

NRCS **NEWS RELEASE**

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NRCS Initiative Targets Flooding and Wildlife Habitat Improvements in Red River Basin

Sign-up ends March 30, 2012

ST PAUL, MN, Feb 27, 2012 – The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist Don Baloun announced today that up to \$10.0 million is being made available through the Red River Basin Initiative (RRBI) to help eligible landowners in the three states of Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota to reduce flooding, restore wetlands, and enhance wildlife habitat in the Red River Basin.

The RRBI is one of 15 NRCS Landscape Conservation Initiatives that address resource concerns of national importance by helping America's landowners implement voluntary conservation practices to protect water quality, improve wildlife habitat, and enhance the long-term sustainability of farm and ranch operations for producers in the initiative areas.

"Through landscape initiative partnerships, we're maximizing conservation efforts to address some of our most pressing natural resource challenges," NRCS Chief Dave White said. "The result is far-reaching and long-lasting environmental benefits for the Nation."

The Red River Basin has experienced moderate to severe flooding almost annually since 1993 with some record flooding in recent years. The RRBI will assist farmers and ranchers throughout the area with technical assistance and funding to install conservation practices and develop easement contracts to reduce the potential for flooding in the future.

NRCS offices in the three states are accepting applications until March 30, 2012.
Those applications will be ranked within their individual States.

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In coordination with local, state, and federal agencies and organizations, NRCS' Landscape Conservation Initiatives use a systems approach that focuses technical and financial assistance to implement a suite of conservation practices to address specific resource concerns. Partnering allows the additional leveraging of Federal dollars and insures long-term benefits.

"The RRBI will expand our ability to mitigate flood damage within the Basin by retaining higher levels of flood waters within the acres protected by easements and other conservation practices," said Baloun. "Projects funded through this initiative will reduce the costs to our rural private landowners who continue to experience severe damages during these flood events."

Much of the work in the RRBI is carried out through a wetlands restoration and easement program, which provides voluntary technical and financial assistance to private landowners and Indian tribes to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands that have been degraded or converted to agricultural uses. More than 80 percent of the restorable wetlands in the Red River Valley are privately owned.

Projects funded through RRBI will result in long-term benefits to taxpayers by reducing funding spent by local and state governments to repair damaged roads, bridges, and public areas. Reduced damage to cropland and associated disaster and damage payments will also save taxpayers money in the long term.

Farmers and ranchers interested in participating in RRBI or any other NRCS programs and services, are urged to contact their local NRCS office to apply for assistance or visit www.nrcs.usda.gov for more information.

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